



United States Attorney's Office  
District of Columbia

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Fourth Trinidadian pleads guilty to hostage-taking resulting in death of American man in Trinidad**

WASHINGTON - A Trinidadian national, Leon Walter Nurse, has pleaded guilty to the hostage-taking resulting in the death in Trinidad of U.S. citizen Balram Maharaj in 2005, U.S. Attorney Jeffrey A. Taylor and Jonathan I. Solomon, Special Agent in Charge of the Miami Field Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, announced today.

Nurse, 44, formerly of Morvant, Trinidad, pleaded guilty today before the Honorable John D. Bates in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia to the charges of hostage-taking resulting in death and conspiracy to commit hostage-taking resulting in death. The victim had been visiting relatives in Trinidad when he was taken hostage. Nurse faces a maximum sentence of up to life imprisonment under the hostage-taking statute. The United States has agreed not to seek the death penalty against Nurse. A sentencing date has not yet been set.

Nurse was arrested in Trinidad on January 28, 2006, and extradited to the United States on July 27, 2008. At the time of his arrest, Nurse was a Sergeant in the Trinidad & Tobago Defense Forces and he was a former member of the TTDF Special Forces Unit. Ten other individuals, including Wayne Pierre, also known as "Ninja," Kevin Nixon, also known as "Shaka," Christopher Sealey, also known as Christopher Bourne and "Boyie," and Anderson Straker, also known as "Gypsy's Son," Ricardo De Four, Zion Clarke, Kevon Demerieux, also known as "Ketchit," Russel Jerry Joseph, also known as "Saucy," Winston Gittens, Jason Errol Percival, also known as "Soldier," have been extradited to the United States in connection with the hostage-taking of Maharaj. Joseph pled guilty on July 26, 2006, Gittens pled guilty on February 27, 2007, and Percival pled guilty on November 16, 2007, to the same charges as Nurse. The trial of the remaining defendants is scheduled to begin on May 26, 2009.

All defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

In April 2005, the victim, Balram Maharaj, a naturalized American citizen of Trinidadian heritage, returned to his native land to visit his family. According to

government's evidence, the ordeal began for Maharaj when, on April 6, 2005, he was seized by armed gunmen as he sat relaxing at the Samaan Tree Bar. Maharaj, 61, suffered from poor health and was held hostage under very harsh conditions, including depriving him of essential medications, while his abductors demanded a ransom from his family for his release. The dismembered and badly decomposed body of Maharaj was located by the authorities in a remote area of Trinidad on January 8, 2006.

In announcing the guilty plea in the Nurse case, U.S. Attorney Taylor and FBI Special Agent in Charge Solomon praised the hard work of the FBI's Miami Division Extra-territorial Squad, in particular the former lead case agent William Clauss, the current lead agents Edgar Cruz and Kenith Jett, FBI Forensic Odontologist Scott Hahn, the FBI Evidence Response Team, FBI Agent Marvin Freeman, formerly the Assistant Legal Attache in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service Anti-Kidnaping Squad and Homicide Bureau, in particular Commissioner of Police James Philbert, Acting Superintendent Wayne Boyd, Inspector Johnny Abraham, Sergeant Wendell Lucas, Sergeant Michael Seales, Detective Corporal Eric Park and Detective Constables Kendell Abraham, Marvin Pinder, Larry Lodhar, Montgomery Trotman and Phillip Forbes, the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of the Attorney General, Carla Brown-Antoine, the Acting Director of Public Prosecutions in Trinidad and Tobago, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Montreal, Canada, the staff of the U.S. Consulate and U.S. Embassy in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, and Jeffrey Olson, Trial Attorney, Department of Justice, Office of International Affairs. Furthermore, they praised paralegal specialist Jeannette Fennell, and Assistant U.S. Attorneys Bruce R. Hegyi, Jeanne M. Hauch, and Emily A. Miller, who are prosecuting the case.

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